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# REFORM IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

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MANY attempts have been made at reform in the Roman Catholic Church. Some of these have succeeded in part, others have failed. From a Protestant point of view, all these efforts have accomplished but little; the Roman Catholic Church remains essentially an unreformed Church. But history makes it evident that the ordinary Protestant opinion is erroneous. In fact, Protestantism has advanced so far beyond its original position that, even if all the reforms demanded by the original Protestant Reformers had been accomplished, the Protestants of the present day would still regard the Roman Catholic Church as unreformed. The history of that Church since the sixteenth century has been a history of reforms, and in no period have such great reforms been made as in the past half-century.

Leo XIII was certainly a reforming Pope; of a high moral character, a man of letters and of profound knowledge, firm in purpose but patient in spirit, broad-minded and tolerant, he left the Church, when he died, morally and intellectually much higher than when he succeeded Pius IX. But the present Pope, Pius X, promises to be a still greater reformer. He has already accomplished much in the few months of his pontificate; great reforms are in his mind, which ere long will become evident in fact.

Reforms in the Roman Catholic Church have usually begun in France or Germany, and have been resisted in Italy, and especially in Rome. Many reforming Popes have failed in their noble purposes owing to the stubborn opposition of the Roman Curia, whose interests were all in the perpetuation of their authority and privileges. The significance of the present movement

is not only in the fact that the Pope himself is a reformer; but still more in that reform has begun in Italy, and most of all in Rome, and is promoted by members of the Curia itself.

A few weeks ago, there appeared a pamphlet, "*Pio X, Suoi Atti e Suoi Intendimenti.*" This was at once translated into French and German, and in all editions sold in many thousands so rapidly that it has been difficult to supply the demand. It was soon followed by another entitled, "*Questioni Politico-Religiose, dopo gli Atti ed Intendimenti di Pio X,*" which in some respects is a much stronger plea for reform. Another tract on the side of reform is "*Fiat Pax,*" which proposes that the Pope shall remove to Jerusalem, and make there the seat of his civil authority. The most recent pamphlet is entitled, "*Riforma! Nota Critico-Polemiche di un Sacerdote Romano.*" It reviews with keen criticism all the previous pamphlets, and advances the cause of reform, especially in the education of the clergy. As was to be expected, several replies have been made, the only important one, representing the party of privilege and obstruction, being that of the journal "*La Vera Roma,*" entitled, "*Il Papa è il Papa.*" Doubtless, a flood of controversial literature will burst forth from the press, now that the gates are open.

There can be no doubt that the Pope himself is at the head of the reform movement; but it would be improper to hold him responsible for all that these reforming pamphlets propose.

It is of great importance to understand the fundamental principle of reform in the words of the Pope himself, namely, "*Restaurare ogni cosa in Cristo,*" to make Jesus Christ Himself the centre and mainspring of all reform. This is exactly what the most enlightened Protestants desire for their own Churches; what more can they ask for the Church of Rome? The Christological movement has been, and still is, one of the strongest impulses of the past fifty years. It is of immense significance that the Roman Catholic Church, under the headship of the Pope, deliberately enters into, and takes part in, this world-wide movement. It is a common objection of Protestants to the Roman Catholic Church that it pushes Jesus Christ into the background, and that the popular religion is the worship of the Virgin and the Saints. This objection is not altogether valid; for the sacrifice of the Mass is the great central fact in the worship of the Church, where Jesus Christ Himself, in real, substantial bodily

presence, reigns supreme, and is worshipped as God and Saviour. But it has been true in the Roman Catholic Church, as in the Protestant Churches, until recent years, and among Protestant theologians at the present time, that Jesus Christ has not held the central and dominant place in Christian doctrine and Christian life that is His due. The more advanced Protestant scholars have been working for half a century and more to lead Christians back to Jesus Christ, and have only partially succeeded. If now the Pope, as the head of the Roman Catholic Church, owing to the reverence and obedience given him by that whole Church as the successor of St. Peter and the living representative of our Lord, can succeed in raising up Catholics throughout the world to this exalted position of reforming everything in Christ, there will be ere long the greatest revival and reformation known to history, and the Protestant Churches will have to bestir themselves to keep pace with it.

The Pope has spent the greater part of his life as a Christian pastor, parish priest, bishop and patriarch of Venice; in each position honored for his piety and wisdom, and beloved for his gentleness, kindness and manifold acts of Christian love. There seems to be good evidence that he was chosen by the Cardinals because of these well-known virtues. The Church felt the need of a pious pastor more than anything else. Immediately on taking his position, Pius X acted as pastor, and began his reform in the sphere of religion. A great change is manifest in Rome. Some years ago, it was the common remark, how irreverent the priests, bishops, and especially the canons were, even in the solemn ceremonies of the Mass. American, English and German Catholics were as much shocked at this state of things as Protestants. The music in the principal churches was too ornate—better suited to a concert-hall or opera than a Christian church. All this has been changed. The services are reverent, the music is solemn and stately, and the ceremonies of the Catholic religion exhibit their grandeur and impressiveness. The applause and cries, "*Il papa re,*" grateful to Pius IX, and allowed by Leo XIII on grand occasions, when they appeared in St. Peter's, have been entirely suppressed. Nothing could be more impressive, during the solemn ceremonies of the Beatifications last autumn, than to see the Pope himself by a motion of his hand and a stern glance suppress the applause that his presence invoked from pilgrims.

The Pope has done his very best during the few months of his pontificate to promote spirituality in the Church. He has himself set the example of preaching practical sermons, and thereby lifted the sermon to a new importance in Rome. He is determined to remove incompetent and worldly bishops, and to appoint men of a higher spiritual character to the vacant sees.

It is, indeed, this firm purpose of removing unworthy bishops that brought the Papacy into conflict with the French Government. There may be a question whether or not the Pope violated the Concordat; but there ought to be no question that the Pope was within his rights, as the chief pastor of the Church, when he undertook to call to account and to discipline bishops who were, by common report and by frequent complaints to Rome, unworthy of their sacred office. It is, indeed, just this that makes the struggle between the Church and the State so serious in France, that the Pope stands for the revival of spiritual religion in the French Church, and it is not at all a question of the Papal prerogative. It is difficult to see how the State can hope to win in such a warfare, when the Church is prepared to sacrifice all its property and civil rights, and to suffer persecution in defence of what Scotch Presbyterians, in a similar situation, called "the crown rights of Jesus Christ."

It is noteworthy that, in this reform movement, little if anything is said of Christian dogma. Many, both Protestants and Roman Catholics, think that dogma is the principal thing, that differences in dogma are the most important, and that reform in dogma should come first. A more thorough study of the sixteenth century makes it evident to historians that the division of the Western Church at the Reformation was not due so much to dogma as is commonly supposed. There were important dogmatic differences, which came into greater prominence after the separation had already taken place. But the princes and people who made the Reformation made it, not in the interest of dogma, but in the interest of freedom from the tyranny of Rome, and of the rights of the nations; and hence the immediate result was national religions, State Churches, all over the Protestant world, repudiating the supremacy of Rome. The most serious evils were—just what is evident in Russia to-day—autocracy, bureaucracy and the intrusion of the Curia into civil affairs.

As the Roman Curia refused to reform itself in these matters,

the nations of Northern Europe took reform into their own hands, and, by separating from Rome, delivered themselves once for all from these evils so far as Rome was concerned, although each nation had to battle its own way to freedom against these same evils in the kings and princes who became little popes, in some respects worse than the Pope himself.

So far as dogma is concerned, the original Reformers repudiated the corrupt and hair-splitting Scholasticism of the fifteenth century, and fell back upon the Bible interpreted by Augustine and Jerome. All the original Reformers were high Augustinians, and they charged the Roman Catholic theologians with Semi-Pelagianism. They also fell back on Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement. It is a common error that they made the Scriptures alone their Rule of Faith. A more thorough study of the Bible has shown that the Reformers were, all of them, greatly mistaken in their interpretations. Protestant theology has, for the most part, abandoned the high Augustinianism of the Reformers. There are few high Augustinians in Europe; and in America they are not to be found, except in a few Theological Seminaries, and among their pupils. The common doctrine of the present Protestant theologians would not be recognized by any of the Reformers. The dogmatic differences with Rome either no longer really exist or are in different forms, and concerned with different questions.

In the mean while, the Roman Catholic Church has not remained stationary. The Council of Trent was a reforming council, and banished from the Church many vulgar errors and corrupt practices, against which the Reformers protested in the sixteenth century. The Roman Catholic Church has made, in recent years, two important dogmatic decisions—namely, the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, and the Infallibility of the Pope in faith and morals, when he speaks *ex cathedra* to the Catholic world. These were not new dogmas, but final decisions of mooted questions; the former deciding the contest between Franciscans and Dominicans; the latter defining the seat of the infallibility of the Church as being in the Papacy, rather than in Councils. The former decision was universally accepted in the Roman Catholic Church, and there are many Protestant theologians who think it an inevitable consequence of the doctrine of original sin. The latter was rejected by a small number of

eminent scholars, who organized themselves as a separate body, called "Old Catholics," but they succeeded in detaching only a very small number of people from the Mother Church. Indeed, it was a purely academic question, whether infallibility is to be lodged in the Council or in the Pope. Many found it easier to believe in the infallibility of one official person, the head of the Church, than in the infallibility of a Council composed of a number of men moved by party interests and personal considerations, and whose decisions are made by a majority of votes, rather than by the most competent and intelligent voices. The Infallibility of the Pope, as defined by the Vatican Council, limits infallibility, and so hedges it with conditions that infallible decisions in the past are hard to find, and not likely to occur in the future except in great emergencies. The only infallible decision of a Pope in modern times, apart from a Council, has been that defining the Immaculate Conception. This is the consensus of opinion in Rome, and it is the decision of the Pope himself.

The Roman Catholic Church made a very important reform in dogma when Leo XIII directed that Thomas Aquinas should be used as the standard authority in all Roman Catholic colleges and seminaries, for thereby Theology was divested of the accretions of the so-called newer Scholasticism since the Reformation, and of the corrupt Scholasticism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; and Roman Catholic dogma was built upon the purest and best Scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas and his contemporary Bonaventura. This was a reform in dogma of incalculable importance. It is doubtful, to say the least, if there would have been such an antithesis between Protestant and Roman Catholic dogma if Thomas Aquinas had been the universal standard of doctrine in the sixteenth century.

The reforms proposed at the present time—apart from the religious reforms already considered—are ecclesiastical; and, first of all, of Canon Law, which, as interpreted by the Curia, determines all ecclesiastical affairs. Canon Law is an ocean so vast in extent, that it demands more time and attention to master it than all other branches of Christian Theology combined. Few are able even to swim in it. It is a heterogeneous mass of material, representing many centuries of legal development under the most varied circumstances, and capable of varied interpretations. An able Committee has already been appointed to reduce

this material to a code of Ecclesiastical Law that will be rid of antiquated material, and be adapted to the present circumstances and conditions of the Church.

Next in importance to the reform of the Canon Law is the reform of the Curia, which interprets and applies the Canon Law in the government of the Church. The Curia is composed of a number of Congregations or Committees, among which are distributed all the interests of the Church. The members of these Congregations are Cardinals, Monsignori, members of religious orders, and occasionally other prelates and priests. These constitute the Papal family or court, and are the practical rulers of the Church; for, although everything of importance has to be approved by the Pope, yet it is impracticable for him to give personal attention to any but the most essential matters.

The decisions of these Congregations, even when approved by the Pope, are not infallible; yet they demand implicit obedience of all Catholics, even those of the highest rank. It is the interest of these Congregations to keep all power in their own hands; and, therefore, the Curia retains the power in the appointment of all bishops throughout the world; it deprives the bishops of their ancient rights of deciding important questions, and reserves to itself the determination of them. When one considers that a majority of the members of the Congregations are not only Italians but Romans, trained in the traditions of the Roman Curia, which is to a great extent self-perpetuating, and that few of them have much knowledge of the world outside of Italy, it is easy to see that all questions throughout the Roman Catholic world are determined from a Roman point of view, and in Roman interests. In civil affairs, Italians and Romans in modern times have not shown any remarkable ability. And yet these Romans think that they have the ability and genius to govern the Church throughout the world, and to govern it with absolute authority, demanding unquestioning obedience. As these reforming pamphlets most clearly show, these Congregations are antiquated in their formation and methods, heterogeneous in their membership, and torpid and inefficient in their action. When their members are carefully examined, it is often difficult to determine on what principle they have been selected, or what real qualifications they have for the all-important tasks brought before them. Not infrequently the same matter goes before two or three different Con-



gregations, and it is said that even the Pope sometimes finds it impossible to fix responsibility for important decisions brought before him for his approval.

When one compares the Curia of Rome with the officials of the great modern States, it is in Russia alone that any such bureaucracy can be found.

How far a reconstruction of the Congregations may be carried out, it is impossible to say. Doubtless, there will be strong resistance against any effort to change traditional methods; but that changes will be made seems to be evident.

More to be desired than these formal changes in the Curia are the material ones. The Curia has for centuries employed usurped powers, and indeed in a tyrannic way. There is authority in Holy Scripture for a ministry of priests and deacons. There is authority in the ancient Church for bishops, parochial, diocesan and provincial, and even for the Pope, in the judgment of many historians. But the Roman Curia rests upon no other authority than that of the Popes. The members of the Curia have, strictly speaking, no ecclesiastical rights. They are simply officers of the Pope, and might be laymen. The reform that is needed above all is to put these officials into their proper place as servants of the Pope, and deprive them altogether of their usurped powers over the bishops of the Church. The officials of the Pope should be, like those of the best modern States, responsible servants, and not, like the Russian bureaucrats, irresponsible autocrats.

These Roman officials have long taken to themselves the highest honors of the Church. They no longer, as non-residents, hold the most lucrative positions all over the Roman Catholic world, as they did at the time of the Protestant Reformation. They no longer prey upon the whole Church by all kinds of imposts, fines and exactions, as they then did. They live in simple and comparatively inexpensive households at the present time. But it is probable, as these reforming pamphlets intimate, that there never was a time when titles of honor were so widely distributed. It now seems to be the exception that any of the officials, unless the members of monastic orders, should be without one. Pius IX delighted in ceremonies and in show. Leo XIII, though more literary in his tastes, was not ill-disposed towards grandeur. All this tended to increase the number of titled members of the

Roman court. But Pius X is more simple-minded and seems to dislike unnecessary display. It is probable, therefore, that there will be a reform of the Papal court in this respect, and that hereafter honors will be more carefully bestowed. As has already been stated, the chief obstacles to reform at the Protestant Reformation were autocracy, bureaucracy and the intrusion of the Curia into civil affairs. The historical development of the modern States has gradually removed the worst of these evils, in spite of the Curia, by making them impossible. It would be unfair, however, not to recognize that a gradual and very important series of reforms have taken place in the Roman court itself. The autocracy of the Pope, while recognized in principle, is really much limited in fact; for, while in one sense the Pope cannot be said to be a constitutional monarch, in another sense he is; because, though he may under certain unusual circumstances make an infallible decision in faith and morals, he may not make any decision which contravenes any made by Popes and Councils in the past. The Pope and the Congregations are also limited by the Canon Law, which, while it needs reform, yet still, until reformed, determines all decisions. There is, however, still room for autocracy to be exercised in a most despotic way. There is little danger of it with the present Pope, but there was constant peril under Pius IX, and there may be under future Popes. It is difficult for American Protestants to understand why the Pope does not strengthen himself by summoning Christian Councils to meet at Rome at regular intervals. The entire Church needs representation at Rome, and ought to have it in regular assemblies of its chief representatives. This is much discussed in Rome, as elsewhere. Many objections are made from a practical point of view, but none of them seems to be valid. The Curia has always opposed Christian Councils, because they inevitably reduce the importance of these officials. But the Pope would find them a most valuable help in enabling him to reform the Curia and reduce it to its proper dimensions.

The intrusion of the Curia into civil affairs, which was the chief occasion of the Protestant Reformation, has been rendered more and more impossible by the Providence of God in History. The Protestant States refused the authority of the Curia altogether. The Catholic States won for themselves protection from its exactions by Concordats, or agreements, between the Pope and the

monarchs. The civil State of the Pope, after centuries of conflict, has been taken from him once for all. It not only stood in the way of the Unity of Italy, but was also a constant temptation to sacrifice the interest of the Church, and the interest of other nations to that of the States of the Church. The only temporal power that the Pope can ever expect to have, is either a limited territory about the Vatican, like our District of Columbia, or a guarantee of independence of himself and his officials from civil control by Italy and the other Powers. It is folly to suppose that the Pope could ever establish himself permanently in Jerusalem, or on the Island of Malta, or anywhere else than in Rome.

The only difficulties that modern States have to contend with, so far as the claims of Rome are concerned, are in mixed questions which partly belong to the jurisdiction of the Church, and partly to the jurisdiction of the State, such as religious education, marriage and divorce. Neither Church nor State can yield its jurisdiction. The only solution that is possible is by friendly agreement. The practical difficulty is now, as it always has been, that the Roman Curia insists upon retaining the decisions of such questions in its own hands. The modern States are willing and desirous to determine these questions in accordance with the religious convictions of their own citizens, so far as these can be brought to agreement; but they are not willing, and will surely continue to decline, to negotiate with the Roman Curia, a foreign court, as regards questions of domestic interest. It is necessary that the Roman Curia should intrust all such questions to the Catholic bishops of the different countries, and suffer the bishops to adjust them in accordance with the special circumstances and conditions of their own nations.

It is too much to expect that all the difficult problems of reform will be solved at once. It will, doubtless, take years, and possibly generations. The path of reform may in many respects be different from that suggested in this article, and will probably be much better than any that has been proposed. It is, however, of the highest importance that the reform movement has been renewed with so much promise under a Pope of such spirituality, simplicity and open-mindedness; a man who impresses those admitted to his presence and converse as being possessed of unusual grasp of mind, insight and real moral power.

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